

**May 2, 2021**

This gospel lesson is all about fruitfulness; being God's presence in this world.

Jesus uses this metaphor of the vine, to describe a relationship... God is the master pruner, Jesus is the vine, and we are the branches.

We also hear a lot about abiding. In this gospel lesson and well as in our epistle lesson. The invitation is to abide in Jesus... This is a big theme in the gospel of John.

When we read this text, there is a tendency to read it as if it is law, meaning that it's our responsibility, and that we will be judged by how well we abide. But, it's really the opposite of that. Through our baptism, we are attached, we are connected, God is the master pruner, and abundance happens! God is the one who is doing the pruning...

Today, I'd like to do some reflecting on the nourishment we receive from being connected to the vine... And how does that nourishment change us, what is that abundant fruit that will be produced for the sake of the world?

Quick story... I've been cutting down a lot of scrubby box elder trees this spring. As you know, they just keep popping up everywhere, and I'm trying to get rid of some of them.

And of course, it seems that with every box elder tree, there's also a ton of vines attached to it. They are opportunistic! And man, are they tenacious! They just become like glue that holds all the branches together. Once the tree is down and you've started cutting off all the branches, you kind of have to untangle the grape vines too.

I cut down some trees in March, and they were soaking wet. The sap was rising, and those branches were literally dripping and heavy. The grape vines weren't as wet, but they were still green and plenty moist.

The sap is really the life blood of a vine. It supports the structure, it fuels the growth, it generates the fruit. Pruning is essential, it directs the sap to maximize the production of fruit. And apart from that life blood, nothing can grow.

When I think about that sap for our Christian life, many things come to mind. I like to think of that sap as God's presence; nourishing us with love and forgiveness. And we experience that in many ways...

There are many good churchy ways, which are important. Like dwelling in the word, participating in worship, communion, bible study, fellowship and so on... All together, we are the body of Christ in this place and time, and for the sake of the world.

And there are also non-churchy ways as well. In our gospel lesson, Jesus is the vine, and we all have access to Jesus all the time and everywhere. Whether we are praying before we go to sleep, whether we are appreciating a beautiful sunset, or whether we are talking with a best friend, Jesus is right there, and sap is flowing, love and forgiveness is always flowing.

I heard an interesting line the other day-- "**How** you get there is where you will arrive." In other words, the manner in which you live your life, will result in where you ultimately end up. And I think there's a lot of truth to that...

Someone who goes through life as a loving, kind and gracious person, will end up being surrounded by other people who are loving, kind and gracious. And dwelling in that mutual love and support, often results in a life characterized with joy and abundance. The world seems to be full of hope and opportunity!

And of course, the opposite is also true. Going through life as an angry, spiteful person, will end up being surrounded by other people who are angry and spiteful. And in that bubble is fear and scarcity. Joy is replaced with cynicism and skepticism.

**How** you get there is where you will arrive...

And what you feed your soul becomes a matter for reflection. When we feed it with anger and hatred, it withers and dies. It's like the dead branches, good for nothing but firewood.

I wonder if this is a spiritual dilemma for our country these days. News agencies, 24/7, and on both sides of the political spectrum, play to fear and anger—it's their business model.

And like people who drive by accidents slowly, so they can see what happened, we seem to be in bondage to it, we feast on it, we seem to get some kind of adrenalin out of it... And ultimately, it brings us nowhere but to more anger and mistrust...

**How** you get there is where you will arrive...

There is hope, there is another way of feeding your soul. As we abide in Jesus, love and forgiveness flows through our lives, we become new creation, and through us love and forgiveness flows outward to others. The fruit we produce, is the love and forgiveness extended to others and for the sake of the world.

The good news today is that God does abide with us, and we abide in him. Because of God's love and mercy, we **are** the transformation for the sake of world. God is the master gardener, He is pruning our lives and shaping us into loving, kind and gracious people!

And frankly, I believe it, because I know you, I've seen it in your hearts...

So, go and spread the **good** news... Amen.